

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 10968

E.O. 1L652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UK, UG

SUBJECT: BRITAIN IN AN UGANDAN DILEMMA

1. THE FCO IS COMING UNDER INCREASING PRESSURE FROM PARLIAMENT AND THE PUBLIC TO ACT VIGOROUSLY IN BRITAIN'S NEW CRISIS WITH UGANDA. THE GENERAL FRUSTRATION--SHARED IN WHITEHALL--ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT'S INABILITY TO INFLUENCE EAST AFRICAN DEVELOPMENTS SPRINGS FROM A SERIES OF RECENT EVENTS WHICH TENDS TO HIGHLIGHT HMG'S IMAGE OF IMPOTENCE AND HUMILIATION: A) THE EXECUTION OF THREE BRITISH MERCENARIES IN LUANDA FOLLOWING A STRING OF UN-ANSWERED APPEALS FOR CLEMENCY INCLUDING MESSAGES FROM PRIME MINISTER CALLAGHAN AND THE QUEEN TO ANGOLAN PRESIDENT NETO MADE THE BRITISH VOICE SEEM HOARSE AS WELL AS FAINT. FOR THREE MONTHS, BRITAIN HAS ATTEMPTED TO ESTABLISH ITS DIPLOMATIC INFLUENCE IN LUANDA ONLY TO MEET WITH REBUFF. HOW LITTLE REGARD ANGOLANS HOLD FOR THE BRITISH BECAME STARKLY APPARENT BY THE DEATH OF THE
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MERCENARIES WITHOUT HEED TO BRITISH OPINION; B) THE

VENGEFUL MURDER OF UK CITIZEN DORA BLOCH IN UGANDA FOLLOWING THE ISRAELI RAID ON ENTEBBE AND AMIN'S SUBSEQUENT EXPULSION OF TWO BRITISH DIPLOMATS PORTRAYED THE BRUTAL IMAGE OF A HALF-BAKED, SEMI-CRAZED' TWO-BIT DICTATOR TRAMPLING THE DIGNITY OF THE ONCE POWERFUL BRITISH PEOPLE: C) AMIN'S APPARENT WILLINGNESS TO REGARD AS HOSTAGES THE 500 BRITISH CITIZENS RESIDENT IN UGANDA UNDERCUTS THE FCO'S JUSTIFICATION FOR CONTINUING RELATIONS WITH AMIN, I.E. THE PROTECTION OF BRITISH CITIZENS. IF AMIN IS INTENT ON THREATENING THESE CITIZENS THERE IS VERY LITTLE HMG CAN DO ABOUT IT. PARLIAMENTARIANS ARE ASKING WHETHER THE GOVERNMENT IS PREPARED TO EVACUATE THE UK NATIONALS. BUT THE REALITY OF THE SITUATION IS THAT THE BRITISH COULD NOT STAGE AN EFFECTIVE EVACUATION WITHOUT SOME DEGREE OF COOPERATION FROM THE UGANDANS. THE MOST ONE CAN HOPE FOR HERE IS AN ORDER FROM AMIN EXPELLING THE BRITISH COMMUNITY IN WHICH CASE HMG WOULD PROVIDE THE TRANSPORTATION; D) THE BRITISH HELPLESSNESS IN FACE OF AMIN'S POSTURING STANDS IN VIVID CONTRAST TO THE BOLD, FORCEFUL RESCUE OF HOSTAGES AT ENTEBBE BY THE ISRAELIS LAST WEEK. WHILE THE SITUATIONS ARE IN NO WAY SIMILAR, THE COMPARISON OF GOVERNMENTAL VIGOR LEAVES THE IMPRESSION OF A FLACCID, TIMID WHITEHALL.

2. PRESS REACTION TO THE UNFOLDING EVENTS HAS VARIED, WITH THE POPULAR PRESS PURSUING AN ALMOST JINGOIST LINE. THE MORE RESTRAINED GUARDIAN HAS COMMENDED THE FCO FOR "PLAYING IT COOL," BUT THE TIMES HAS LAMENTED THE TEPID REACTIONS OF THE FOREIGN OFFICE AS A SIGN OF A HELPLESS BRITAIN. "AN UNFORTUNATE IMPRESSION HAS BEEN GIVEN OF A THREAD OF SYCOPHANCY RATHER THAN SUBTLETY RUNNING THROUGH BRITISH DIPLOMACY," THE TIMES WROTE. "...AND SUCH AN IMPRESSION OF WEAKNESS OR AMATEURISM IS BAD FOR CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO STAND UP FOR THE COUNTRY'S INTERESTS."

3. THE SAD FACT IS THAT THERE IS LITTLE BRITAIN CAN DO TO PROTECT ITS CITIZENS IN UGANDA AND MUCH IT CAN DO TO PLACE THEM IN GREATER JEOPARDY. AN EXPULSION ORDER FROM
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AMIN WOULD BE GREETED HERE WITH RELIEF, FOR AMIN WOULD IN FACT BE TOSSING AWAY THE ONE CARD THAT KEEPS BRITAIN POLITELY AT THE GAMING TABLE. SHORT OF THIS ALTERNATIVE, HOWEVER, HMG WILL TRY TO PURSUE A COURSE WHICH CAN ABSORB THE PUBLIC FRUSTRATION WITHOUT FURTHER ENDANGERING ITS NATIONALS IN UGANDA.

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